

+A pastor recalls being assigned to a rural parish. It was a nice church, but the garage was so cluttered that his car barely fit in. So, he threw away boxes of dusty old cords, tangled wires, and rusty hardware.

A few months later, the parish picnic workers were searching everywhere for the electrical lines and the poles and cables for the picnic booths. That is not the best way to start as a new pastor.

We all know the experience of wanting something that we have discarded or “loaned.” Perhaps it was a handy tool, a home appliance, a holiday keepsake. It was so easy to throw away, so difficult to replace. Or maybe your wife threw out your well-worn favorite tee shirt. You just can’t replace that! That was your keystone of tee shirts.

A keystone is the crown stone of an arch. The whole structure depends on it for support. Without a keystone, the arch will collapse. Christ is the keystone of our faith. Those who reject Him reject their own salvation.

This gospel image has Old Testament roots. The prime example is Joseph, the favorite of Jacob’s twelve sons. Joseph is a symbol, a pre-figure of Christ.

Joseph was abandoned and sold into slavery by his traitorous brothers but later it was Joseph who saved those same brothers in time of famine.

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure.”

In the gospel parable, when the tenant farmers rejected the landlord’s son they lost their only hope of sharing in the harvest. At vintage time, it was others who enjoyed the grapes of salvation. This parable was directed at the audience of Christ who rejected Him.

But there is also an enduring message for our age. Modern Christians can feel at times that some teachings of their faith, or traditional devotions, are outdated.

Maybe you have discontinued your daily prayer or just never get around to that rosary. Then there is Sunday Mass replaced by.....

But later we may realize that what we have discarded is precisely what we really needed, because our life begins to feel empty and without meaning. The spiritual well runs dry, and we realize our need for daily communion with God.

Or maybe something traumatic happens in our lives and we have no faith to lean on nor this Body of Christ to support us. Only too late do we realize our need for spiritual practices we have discarded.

“The stone which the builders rejected becomes the keystone of the structure.”

A teacher recalls that he taught at a Catholic high school for many years. When students became discouraged with their studies or disappointed with their grades, they often rebelled and said foolish things like, “I’m not going to do my homework anymore.” “I’m not going to study this junk.”

Somehow, they thought that by not studying they would punish the teacher, or their parents, or the school. In reality, they harmed only themselves.

We adults can have a similar childish rebellion in faith. When life is burdensome and our prayers are not answered, we get angry at God and indulge in foolish thoughts:

“Why pray? It doesn’t do any good.” “Church is a waste of time.” Why give them my hard-earned money! Naively, we think that we are punishing the Church. But, in fact, we are only harming ourselves or the people of God in need of our help.

Any time we try to punish the object of our anger or jealousy or envy, we are really punishing ourselves and that of our brothers and sisters. When we neglect the practice of our faith, we starve our inner spirit. When we dismiss any doctrine of our faith, we dismantle the foundation of our life.

Eventually we will be searching for the very things we have discarded. “The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure.”

In light of the horrors that continues to happen in America, Have we discarded God from the public sphere/vineyards?

Where is God? No, where are we?

Because God is no longer allowed in our public schools. Coaches are fired for praying.

During a confirmation hearing for 7th Circuit Court of Appeals nominee Amy Barrett, senator Dianne Feinstein attacked her for her Roman Catholic faith.

No more religious displays are allowed in any government buildings.

Numbers continue to slide in people attending church and those who still do so, have become even much more casual about weekly worship attendance.

The number of people getting married continues to fall (it’s the lowest ever – they just live together), which means that God is no longer invited to unite them or be a part of the family.

Children are growing up in households with no faith at all. It is not that they are rejecting God, they just no longer know of God’s existence. When evil calamities do happen, where do they turn?

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure.”

Yet, despite all of this, God is still present for us and can work through this in all of us. It was through that cross that Jesus conquered the world for us.

As a wise man once said to me, "God's ultimate answer to suffering isn't an explanation; it's the incarnation."

+Officer John McGrath saved the life of Jonathon Smith, who had previously saved the lives of 30 people, before being shot twice.

McGrath said, "Through this tragedy I remember, nobody suffered alone. When people were dying there was somebody there who was holding their hands, comforting them. When people had injuries, no matter how severe it was, (people were) trying to get them to safety, nobody suffered alone."

Yes, he was there holding us through us.